



OBSOLETE!

ISSUE # 3

FERAL. Technology. Technology Gone WILD

“Renegade unmanned drone wandered skies near nation’s capital”

read the August 26th, 2010 headline on Yahoo News. The story explained, “The drone, a Northrop Grumman MQ-8B Navy Fire Scout, is supposed to have a failsafe system that directs it to land safely if it loses its communication link with the controller on the ground. That obviously didn’t happen on the drone’s Aug. 2 flight, and it made a beeline from Naval Air Station Patuxent River in southern Maryland, where it was being tested, toward Washington. It was roughly 40 miles from the capital before the Navy regained control.” Where did the drone “think” it was going? What was it “planning” to do?

More and more, humanity’s technological offspring is coming of age and being given its independence. However, our sentient electronic progeny is growing up to look more like Skynet than Robby the Robot. GPS, facial recognition software and CCTV coordinate and catalog our moves through the physical hive, while the World Wide Web and social networking create the hive mind. Robots manufacture our goods and run our warehouses. The latest new car models feature automatic parallel parking and braking, and next years models will feature automatic lane changing.

So far, our artificial intelligence has not chosen to unleash the “Terminator” scenario like Skynet. Steven Levy, in the Dec. 2010 issue of Wired wrote, “In its earlier days, artificial intelligence was weighted with controversy and grave doubt, as humanists feared the ramifications of thinking machines. Now the machines are embedded in our lives, and those fears seem irrelevant.”

Technology appears to still be reliant on humans, particularly to supply its voracious need for energy. If humans suddenly disappeared, technology could not run for long on autopilot without humans to feed it electrons. Recent images of Chernobyl show us a 1980’s Soviet city in the Ukraine, abandoned after a nuclear power plant disaster. The buildings are silent, the machinery quietly rusting and returning to the earth, the streets occupied only by reindeer and fox. But imagine a modern computerized city, abandoned by humans because of a disaster, it’s power-grid humming along, it’s CCTV cameras cataloging the movements of the animals that now inhabit it. How would those animals use the heat and light? What sort of evolution would take place?

For now, it is up to humans to unleash the potential in technology. In many cases, doing so in ways not intended by “Authorities” appears to be humanities best hope for the advancement of civilization. It is not the authorized use of technology that moving us forward, but rather its abuse.

The actions of Wikileaks and the hacker collective Anonymous provide reasons for hope. Wikileaks has done more to shine light on the real workings of the power elite than any news outlet since Watergate. When the world’s oligarchs set out to silence Wikileaks, Anonymous set about attacking the nervous system of their money machine. Meanwhile, columnist Dan Savage is re-loading his 2004 Google-based attack against Rick Santorum, the radical anti-gay

rights Republican presidential hopeful. Thanks to Savage’s creative use search-engine technology, the top Google search result for “Santorum” is now “1. The frothy mix of lube and fecal matter that is sometimes the byproduct of anal sex. 2. Senator Rick Santorum” (go ahead and google it for yourself! Remember, by doing so, you help solidify the ranking of that definition.) While more and more people are satisfied to fall into the societal hypnosis and cultural Stockholm syndrome of mass media and consumer culture, these digital revolutionaries are fighting a very real war on the battlefield of the “New Reality”.

In the developing world, mobile technology is becoming the dominant agent of change. Villagers across the globe are using mobile phones to transform their economic and political lives. Without grid power, creative uses of scavenged power supplies provide battery charging. Cheap solar cells, peddle-powered generators and home-built wind turbines are all being used to supply “juice”.

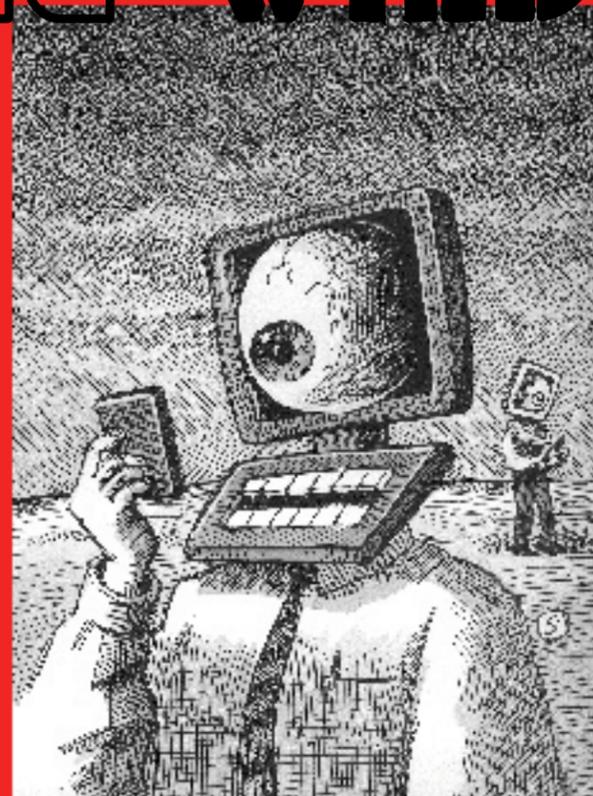
Much credit has recently been given to social networking tools like Facebook and Twitter for the pro-democracy protests in the Middle East, but it is the creative use of those tools that has made those actions possible. Anonymous was preparing to reverse-engineer the revolution to use fax technology. If that didn’t work, it would have been Xerox copiers or ditto machines, or...?

In this issue of OBSOLETE! we explore the relationships between humans, their technology and “The Wild”. We wonder what happens to technology when it becomes cast-off, or when it is repurposed. What happens in that territory when good economic times swell and push technology into the wilderness and what is left behind when that tide recedes?

Feral Technology. Technology that has escaped from domestication and adapted to the wild. Technology that has found a new use for itself. Technology that has escaped extinction by lurking around the industrial wasteland at the edge of town.

In 1942, Isaac Asimov authored the “Three laws of Robotics”

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey any orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.



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New Work By: Alissa Bader, Tim Beckett, Amy & Shane Bugbee, Ray Cathode, MaryAnn McCarra-Fitzpatrick, Wister D. Lamb III, Sean Madden, W. Joe Hoppe, Qoqak
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